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Cobb, Clarence F.

An address delivered before  
the Maryland Historical  
society, March 12th, 1883





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THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN.

1862.

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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MARCH 12th, 1883.

BY

CLARENCE F. COBB,

*Late Private, 9th Corps, U. S. Army.*

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## THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN.

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*An address delivered before the Maryland Historical Society.*

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In jaunting about the battle-fields and studying in a crude way the campaigns of our war we cannot help being convinced that the Art of War has not improved for centuries. In this regard it much resembles other arts. Where has been the improvement in the plastic art since Phidias? The broken-nosed Buonarroti, with all his genius, never turned from his deft hands a statue that could excel those fashioned by the mighty master who had passed away many centuries before him. Where has been the improvement in the Builder's Art since the old masters reared the Parthenon and the Coliseum? The Alhambra, St. Peters, and our Capitol are mere patch-work compared to them. Not that we wish to say there have not been minor improvements in War; in arms, projectiles, &c., but it cannot be denied that the principles remain as they were during the wonderful campaigns of Hannibal. When General Lee was discussing with General Longstreet the then contemplated offensive campaign that ended so disastrously for their cause at Gettysburg, Longstreet opposed it and advised that, instead of that movement, Bragg should be reinforced heavily, march north, defeat Rosecrans, continue, and by such means relieve Vicksburg. He argued that Grant would be thus compelled to raise the siege and hasten to Rosecrans's aid. When one of Hannibal's armies was besieged in Capua by three Roman armies he conceived the idea, being outside with another army, to march on Rome and thus raise the siege. This strategy was carried out with great success by Jackson when Me-

Clellan was drawing his lines about Richmond in 1862, and it saved the Confederate Capital for nearly three years.

It is abominably hard to get at the truth of a battle. You would have a nice time in trying to convince an Englishman that Wellington was beaten to a dead stand-still at Waterloo and would have retreated had not Blücher marched from Wavre and doubled up Napoleon's flank; yet the French and Prussians stick to that. And you would waste your labor should you try to make a Frenchman believe that the Duke would have defeated them if Blücher had not come at all; yet the English writers adhere to that. And you might pour a keg of beer into a Prussian, and marry his daughter, and smoke a long pipe with him till doomsday, and tell him the facts, yet he would not believe but the English and the other troops under Wellington were defeated, and Blücher saved them. All the world of literature issued since 1815 leaves Waterloo in just that muddle; and that is what is the matter up here.

After General Lee had defeated the Federal army on the Peninsula, then marched north and defeated General Pope, he was too wise to essay a direct attack on the fortifications of Washington, so he continued north, crossed the upper fords of the Potomac and took position at Frederick, Md. The consternation in Washington was great. There was a good, honest, tall, thin man in the Presidential Chair, and a short, stout man, who wore a beard and spectacles, but no mustache, was his immediate Mars, and under him was a big-headed man, with two stars on each shoulder, and all this big-headed man could boast of was his big head. He was full of theory to be sure, and had written military works, but there were so many ifs, ands and buts in his composition that he never did anything decisive but die in 1872, and there is a horrible suspicion abroad now that he would not have done that could he have helped it.

Who was to command the Army of the Potomac? The big-headed man never thought of placing himself at its head it appears, although if he had any drive, and vim, and push,

and dare in him, that is just where he belonged. The Administration thought of giving Banks the command, but it learned that he would decline it if offered, and it was not tendered. The bad feeling that had grown up against McClellan in Washington prevented its being offered to him at once, but he was placed over it finally, on Sept. 2d, and he marched it up into Maryland.

The general situation of affairs in the early part of September was about so :—The Confederate army was collected about Frederick in high morale, but very short of supplies. It, after its remarkable successes on the Peninsula and in front of Washington, looked upon itself as almost invincible, and it was eager to be attacked or attack whenever the Federal army showed uncovered front. The Federal army was gathered about Washington and was suffering from that depression that always accompanies defeat; but its supplies of all kinds were abundant, and reinforcements were being received daily from the north and west by rail.

Whether General Lee's plans were to advance into Pennsylvania, or march upon Washington, he judged it wise to first leave the Valley of the Shenandoah clear of a hostile force. With this end in view he divided his army to surround Harper's Ferry, occupied by Col. Dixon S. Miles and 12,000 or 13,000 Federal troops. The order directing this was dated Sept. 9, which was Tuesday, and it will be found in full on page 188 of McClellan's report. Jackson with three (3) divisions was to march from Frederick to Williamsport, cross the Potomac there, come down its west (right) bank and take possession of Bolivar heights. McLaws with two (2) divisions was to march via Middletown, through Middletown and Pleasant valleys to seize Maryland heights. Walker with one division was to cross the Potomac below Harper's Ferry, march up its west (right) bank and secure Loudoun heights. These marches were begun on Sept. 10th; they were made with great success, and on Sept. 15th Jackson was in position on Bolivar, McLaws on Maryland, and Walker on Loudoun heights. Their artillery opened upon

the Federals, played about two hours, and then the flag of surrender was shown. The Confederates, not seeing the token, kept up the fire and Col. Miles was wounded after the flag was run up and died the next day. He was an élève of the Military Academy, had seen 38 years' service, and had been in command of Harper's Ferry for six months, therefore it cannot be pleaded that he did not know his ground.

If you will take the capital letter **Y**, you will have the position of Harper's Ferry before you. The upright and upper right hand stroke is the Potomac; the left hand stroke is the Shenandoah river which enters the Potomac and forms the crotch; between these streams is the town of Harper's Ferry; on the right of this letter **Y**, close to the river, are the Maryland heights; on the left are the Loudoun heights; in the crotch and back of the town are the Bolivar heights. The key-point to the position is Maryland heights, which tower far above Loudoun and Bolivar, and artillery planted upon them commands the rest and could knock the town to pieces with a few dozen rounds; yet strange to say, astonishing to relate, wonderful to be forced to record, Col. Miles, when the Confederates appeared, drew nearly all his forces into Harper's Ferry and staid till he was surrounded. It was in vain his officers urged him to abandon all else and place all his forces on Maryland heights; in vain they argued with him that that was the key-point to the whole position. He had received orders to hold on to Harper's Ferry, and, interpreting such orders literally as applying to the town itself, he stuck to the town. It may be well to state that the southern face of Maryland heights is perpendicular, so it would have been but necessary for him to defend its northern slope. Had he transferred his whole force there and fortified it on the north, he could have laughed at the Confederate attack, even though it had been supported by their whole army. He had assigned Col. Ford to hold the Maryland heights, but Ford's action was infamously feeble—he spiked his guns, tumbled them down hill, retreated across to Harper's Ferry, and when McLaws secured these heights

the game was up. The Confederates captured 12,000 men, 73 pieces of artillery, many thousand small arms and large stores.

There was a tremendous howl raised over this affair by the press of the north and west. Ford was dismissed from the service and Miles, though dead, was handled severely. It taught the Federal officers a harsh lesson, and the Confederates made no attempt to capture the position during the Gettysburg campaign. During Early's raid in 1864, Breckenridge essayed it, but Sigel threw his own force on Maryland heights and could have laughed at his assaults had he made them.

The whole movement is a fruitful study for the military student, much resembling, though on a smaller scale, and though before Mack was surrounded, Napoleon's troops had not a single starting point as Lee's had, the concentration on Ulm in 1805, when Ney came from Lake Constance, Lannes from Upper Swabia, Soult and Davoust from Bavaria and the Palatinate, Bernadotte and Augereau from Franconia, and the Imperial Guard from Paris and they all juggled Mack in Ulm. And it much resembles too the concentration by Washington of the contingents from New York and North Carolina, of new levies from Virginia, and the French fleet from the West Indies to besiege and capture Cornwallis a hundred years ago.

Concentric movements on a large scale are usually condemned by the writers on the Art of War, but here we see them crowned with complete success, and we are minded to ask what would have been the result during the Seven Years War, when Frederick contended successfully against Austria, France, Russia, Saxony and Sweden, if those powers had placed their forces under one able head and surrounded him as Cornwallis was surrounded at Yorktown, Mack at Ulm, and Miles at Harper's Ferry?

The order referred to above also directed Longstreet to leave Frederick and march to Boonesboro', there to halt with the trains; General D. H. Hill's division to act as the



rear guard, and Stuart with his cavalry to cover the route and bring up all stragglers. The capture of Harper's Ferry was looked upon as sure, and after such capture Genl. Lee purposed concentrating his army at Boonsboro' or Hagerstown. Harper's Ferry fell, as we have seen, but all of Genl. Lee's plans after that were frustrated by a mere accident; on Sept. 13th, late in the afternoon, a copy of this order fell into Genl. McClellan's hands. The possession of this was a wonderful piece of good fortune to McClellan. It told him just how and where Genl. Lee's divisions were scattered, and his own army was well in hand—so he marched it from Frederick, over the Catoctin mountains, across the Middletown valley, and struck the Confederates on the South mountains, that are a continuation of the Blue Ridge.

The battles of South mountain were fought on Sunday, Sept. 14, 1862. The South mountains are not detached heights, but a chain of hills, and where the main battle was fought are about 1,000 feet high. Should you leave Frederick and go west about twelve miles, over the old National Pike, which was a busy road when steam was in its infancy and the stocks of stage companies were valuable, you would reach Turner's Gap; some six miles south of which is Crampton's Gap. The former was defended that day by Generals D. H. Hill and Longstreet, the latter by a part of McLaws's command under Genl. Cobb.

The Federal cavalry under Pleasanton developed the Confederate position, and the leading division of the 9th Corps, under Cox, deployed to the south of the pike and advanced to and up the mountain. The other divisions of this corps—Wilcox's, Sturgis's and Rodman's—in the course of the day turned south too and followed Cox. That placed the whole 9th Corps on the left and the able Jesse Reno commanded it. The 1st Corps under Joe Hooker marched up this pike jauntily and turned north to Mount Tabor church, where its leading division under Meade deployed facing west, and advanced up the mountain, and the 1st Mass. cavalry was sent farther north to defend the right flank.

The other divisions of this corps were deployed as they came up; Hatch's on the left and Ricketts's, about 5 P. M., in the rear. Genl. Gibbon's brigade was detached from Hatch's division and sent straight up the pike to attack the center.

That was the general disposition. The idea was to attack the Confederates on the right, left and center. The day was very warm and the men till 2 o'clock suffered much from the heat; then it became cloudy and cool. Nothing daunted at so formidable a position they were in jolly spirits, and after several hours' bloody work they pressed the Confederates up the mountain, slowly, bloodily, but steadily, and secured the crest. All the firing did not cease till quite nine at night. Cox's division of the 9th Corps got to work earlier than any others on the Federal left and they crowded the Confederates up and back steadily. When he reached the crest there was no other division to support him and his ammunition was nearly gone. In such a situation he could only make his men lie down to escape the hostile fire and a North Carolina battery on their right and front sprinkled them with canister but they held their ground. By-and-by Wilcox, Sturgis and Rodman, with their divisions, came clambering and fighting up to support, and when the line was formed Cox worked his division well around on the right flank and rear of the Confederates, and when the charge was sounded in they went with a rush, and the Confederates, doubly outnumbered, broke and retreated.

Hooker with the 1st Corps fought his way up on the right. Meade commanded his right division and Seymour commanded Meade's right brigade, and he worked it around well on the rear and left flank of the Confederates, and forced them back there. In fact, the Federals had too many guns and men for the Confederates and out-flanked them right and left, besides, Gibbon attacked the center. The Confederates made a good fight; a stubborn and tenacious resistance; held on gallantly to every fence, stone wall, and ledge of rocks as they were crowded up and back. There were many places where it was hard for an unincumbered man to climb, so you can see that it was a severe struggle. On

the Confederate right Genl. D. H. Hill commanded, on the left, Longstreet. They had but 15,000 men engaged. The Federals had 30,000, but the position was worth the difference. The line as fought was quite three miles long. It was a long, sharp, bloody thirteen hours' pull. Genl. Reno was killed about sunset—as gallant a man as ever wore spurs; as just a man as ever lived; beloved by his men; honored by all; the man who did the brain-work of the North Carolina expedition; the leading spirit at New Berne and Roanoke. Strange Providence beyond our ken, yet ever wise, that the life-blood of such a man should make fat a handful of earth on yonder lonesome heights. They have placed but a rough stone up there to mark where he fell—he has a thousand living monuments in the hearts of his men of the 9th Corps. Genl. Garland, commanding a Confederate brigade was killed here; a christian gentleman of high character.

Some six miles south of Turner's Gap, through the same mountains, is Crampton's Gap, and while the above was going on there was a side issue there. Genl. Franklin, with the 6th Corps, attacked there about 12 o'clock, with Slocum's, Newton's and Smith's divisions, forced the Confederates, who were commanded by Genl. Cobb, steadily up and back until he gained the crest and road, and the Confederates broke and retreated. Franklin's loss was 533—Cobb's loss was a little over 900, 400 of which were prisoners. The Federal loss at Turner's Gap was 1,560; the Confederate loss was 3,000, of which 1,500 were prisoners. During these engagements Genl. Lee's headquarters were at Boonsboro', at or near the widow Herr's house.

McClellan has been criticised for fighting at Turner's Gap, it being held that he should have amused Longstreet and Hill and they would have been obliged to retreat when Franklin broke through, as McC. could have thrown the whole Army of the Potomac through Crampton's Gap across Lee's line of retreat to the Potomac. That is very true, but that is what the soldiers so pregnantly called "hindsight." If an officer could read the future, what a General he would



be. A wagon-master can stand on Mont St. Jean or La Belle Alliance *now*, and see where an Emperor erred, but that is hindsight too. In the field, in the rush and hurry of a campaign, a general must be governed by what is known to him, and by his previous education, unless he possess what Jomini is pleased to call the "Inspiration of War." We did not have a very great number with that prescience from 1861 to 1865.

This stubborn defense made at these gaps delayed the Federal army a full day, which enabled Genl. Lee to withdraw after night and take position behind the Antietam, where he could reunite his scattered divisions. The Federal army followed the next morning, Monday, the 15th, the cavalry in the advance, and it made a handsome charge through the streets of Boonsboro' on the Confederate rear guard of mounted troops, scattering it and capturing 250 prisoners and two guns.

The battle at Turner's Gap was a defensive one for the Confederates and an offensive one for the Federals, and perhaps no battle ever illustrated in a more forcible way the proverbial inaccuracy of a down-hill fire. The Confederate fire seemed farcical excepting where canister was used. It much resembled Buena Vista, where Genl. Taylor, with only 5,000 or 6,000 men, beat off 25,000 Mexicans; but that was Anglo-Saxons against degenerate Latins, steel against lead—here it was steel against steel, and Providence, who is the best General after all, fought with the biggest battalions.

No man could stand in Middletown Valley and look up the South Mountains and not realize that the Confederates had a great advantage in position in these two engagements, but then it must be remembered that the Federals had an enormous advantage in numbers.

The forcing these two passes gave the right wing of the Army of the Potomac, commanded by Burnside, comprising the 1st Corps under Hooker and the 9th Corps now under Cox, and the left wing, the 6th Corps under Franklin, free passage into Boonsboro' Valley and Pleasant Valley. Now, be

it remembered that McLaws's two divisions had, under Genl. Lee's order, marched down Pleasant Valley to seize Maryland Heights, therefore Genl. McClellan ordered Genl. Franklin to fall upon McLaws, but, before Franklin could do this, Col. Miles had surrendered Harper's Ferry, and McLaws marched from Maryland Heights and formed line of battle to resist Franklin. Franklin deemed it unwise to attack and did not.

The general situation on Monday morning, Sept. 15th, was about so: Harper's Ferry was surrendered; the Confederates had lost the engagements at Turner's and Crampton's Gap; Genl. Lee with Longstreet, D. H. Hill's and the most of Stuart's cavalry command, was taking position on the west (right) bank of the Antietam; Genl. Jackson with three divisions and Walker with one were on the west (right) bank of the Potomac in the neighborhood of Harper's Ferry; McLaws's two divisions were in Pleasant Valley and about Maryland Heights, and the Army of the Potomac, excepting the 6th Corps in Pleasant Valley, was in Boonesboro' Valley, pressing Genl. Lee.

As the Federals advanced they picked up many Confederates, stragglers, utterly worn out and many of them barefooted. They gave a pitiful account of their trials, lack of rations, &c., and were clamorous for something to eat as soon as brought in. Many of them had been subsisting for several days on green apples and raw corn. The Federal soldiers generously shared the contents of their haversacks with them.

That Genl. Lee when he took position behind the Antietam did remarkably well in bringing Jackson, McLaws and Walker up the west bank of the Potomac, across at Boteler's ford and to Sharpsburg, is universally conceded. He has been criticised for fighting with a treacherous river at his back, fordable but not bridged, but who has not been criticised? The military writers say there have been but five great Captains—Alexander, Hannibal, Cæsar, Frederick and Napoleon. The English and Germans contend that the

greatest of these was Frederick; the French, Napoleon. The Napoleon of the literature of war, Jomini, thought his royal master, whom he deserted, was the greatest. Dufour thought likewise. Schalk leans toward his fellow-Teuton, Frederick. It is their quarrel; let them fight it out. One thing is very sure, our war did not add a name to the historical roster. And, we ask again, who has not been criticised? When Frederick, in the December cold of 1757, with only 30,000 men attacked Daun and his 86,000 Austrians at Leuthen, defeated him, routed him completely, tore him all to pieces, inflicting upon him a loss of 50,000 men and all his material, did not one of his own generals, the Duke of Bevern, criticise his plan and time of attack? When Napoleon had, as a mere youth, astounded the world by his military successes and carried the Eagles of France over Italy, defeated the Austrian armies as fast as the Aulic Council could organize and forward them, and shut Wurmser up in Mantua, did not that grim old veteran exclaim:—"What the devil is the matter with this young man? he don't fight according to the books"—and when he had shown himself at a later day a wonderful commander in northern fields, did not an able General, Moreau, say sneeringly:—"Conqueror he may be, but he conquers at the rate of 10,000 lives a day."

The officers and writers will criticise all operations in war, whether such enterprises succeed or fail, but the world looks only at the big results, as thus:—The world knows Napoleon was the victor at Wagram, but it does not stop to think that he outnumbered Charles by thirty thousand men, and that he should have come off victorious; it knows he was beaten at Waterloo—worse than beaten, routed—but it does not consider that when old "Marshal Forwards" came on the field he was outnumbered two to one; it knows Mack surrendered to him at Ulm, but it does not know that by a series of magnificent marches and far-reaching combinations he had 100,000 more men on the field than Mack, who was justified in surrendering; it knows the Russians were

defeated at the Alma, but it does not know they were doubly outnumbered by the allies; it knows that near the town of Koniggratz, in 1866, the Prussians defeated the Austrians, on the field of Sadowa that trembled under the tramp of 460,000 men, but it does not know that the Prussians had 60,000 more available men than the Austrians, and that they were armed with breech-loaders and their enemy had muzzle-loaders; it knows generally that the Confederates were beaten finally, and those who shall come after us will look only at that big result, but very few of them will analyze the whys and wherefores.

That Genl. Lee should be criticised for making a stand behind the Antietam, was to be expected. The closet-soldiers and carpet-knights in the light of subsequent events find much to find fault with, but they have not considered that he had a deep insight into the slow and methodical character of his opponent, and he was in ignorance of the big fact that a copy of his order, referred to above, was in his opponent's hands.

Of course any well-read school-boy can know more of Waterloo to-day than Napoleon, Wellington, Grouchy, Blücher, Ney and Thielman knew on June 18th, 1815, and the same boy can know more of Antietam to-day than all the officers and men who drew saber and pulled trigger under McClellan and Lee on this field knew in Sept., 1862. The student cannot criticise fairly what officers did *then*, by taking into consideration what he, in the light of the mass of evidence that is extant *now*, knows at present.

That Genl. Lee deserves great credit for concentrating his army behind the Antietam so well it would be unfair to deny. It is altogether likely that he would not have made the stand he did here could he have foreseen how heavily his army was to be reduced by straggling ere it was positioned, or had he known his numerical inferiority, and that McClellan had his order.

When, in the afternoon of Sept. 15, McClellan's advance reached the left bank of the Antietam he had with him his

1st, 2d, 9th, and 12th Corps and Pleasanton's cavalry—50,000 men at least. Genl. Lee had on the opposite bank only Longstreet's, D. H. Hill's and a part of Stuart's commands—not 12,000. This certainly was a big opportunity for McClellan, but his constitutional caution intervened and he failed to strike.

It cannot be pleaded that McClellan did not know the general situation. He was familiar with the field of operations; he knew the situation of his own troops, and, what is very rare in the heat and hurry of an active campaign, he was in full possession of his enemy's plans. But it can be said in extenuation of his slowness and caution that he was very ill informed as to the numbers of his opponent. And then again it can be further said that no trained officer could look over the field from the left bank and not see that the Confederates had chosen an admirable defensive position.

Genl. Lee made a large showing on the right bank with what troops he had in hand, and this deceived the Federal officers, but Genl. Pleasanton, who was well in the advance, has assured us that he was positive that Lee had but comparatively few troops at hand on the 15th, and he felt sure that so many were kept in sight for a "scare." He communicated this to McC., but it appears he thought otherwise.

At any rate, the opportunity slipped away from McC. on the 15th and 16th, too, and these two days he spent in bringing up troops and batteries, finding fords and distributing supplies. Genl. Lee was very busy too and couriers were flying across the Potomac to Jackson, McLaws and Walker, ordering them to report at Sharpsburg with their troops at the earliest possible moment.

There was a lively artillery duel across the Antietam on the 16th, but the Confederates having fewer rifled guns than their opponents could not cope with them, and their guns were withdrawn to save them from useless sacrifice of men and horses. This was a very warm day and in its early hours, as we have said, Lee had at hand but Longstreet, D. H. Hill and Stuart. In the morning, after a fine march, Jackson



arrived at Sharpsburg, with J. R. Jones's and Lawton's divisions, and took position on Genl. Lee's left. A little later Walker's division arrived. McLaws's and Anderson's divisions did not arrive till the morning of the 17th, and A. P. Hill's division till well into the afternoon of the same day.

Inasmuch as McC. struck no serious blow till the morning of the 17th, it will be seen that Genl. Lee was entirely successful in bringing together his scattered army ere that blow fell. This may be discreditable to McClellan, but it is certainly creditable to Lee.

Genl. Lee had seen much service and knew the tremendous advantage in modern warfare in securing the tactical defensive. Profoundly versed in the literature of war, he recalled Napoleon's advice to Marmont:—"Choose your position, *Maréchal*, and make the enemy attack you;" and as a student he was familiar with Wellington's battles where he had accomplished so much by selecting a position and holding it till the right time came to assume the offensive, as he did at Salamanca, Talavera and Waterloo.

After turning over many books and reports, conversing with a large number of officers and men engaged on either side, and going over the field many times since the battle, we believe Genl. Lee had about 40,000 officers and men engaged, and McClellan had about 60,000. It is well known that Lee threw into action all the troops and guns he could lay his hands on—he had no reserves when the battle ended on the 17th. It is quite as well known that McC. fought warily; held back his reserves and did not use all the 87,000 men he says he had—indeed, he could not have done so, as many of them were far in his rear, straggling. It is necessary to weigh reports made in the heat of war with great care. Two Federal generals wrote from this field that the Confederate loss, in killed and wounded, was 40,000—utter nonsense. On the other hand, a Confederate Lieutenant General, in his official report dated nearly a month after the battle, says:—"Before it was entirely dark" (on the 17th) "the 100,000 men that had been threatening our destruction

for twelve hours had melted away into a few stragglers," and yet the whole Confederate army, on the night of the 18th, retreated from these "few stragglers." Officers are human, and where we find them willing to lay down their lives for their Cause, we must look for prejudiced reports.

The officers in each army, in their reports, complain bitterly of their men straggling. We wish to turn aside just here a moment and say a word in favor of the enlisted men. Should you stand on Broadway and pick out, as the throng passed, a number of men in their physical prime, and march them sixty miles in three days, many of them would straggle. Now, should you equip these men as Federal soldiers were equipped, or feed them as scantily as Confederate soldiers were fed, and march them over the same distance in the same time, the straggling would be heavier still. To be sure it can be said that such men would not be inured to marching; but though they were inured, many of them would straggle. The Confederates had been marched and fought hard, and their rations had been very short for many days prior to Sept. 16, 1862. The Federal soldiers had not been marched so severely, but they had carried heavier burdens in the shape of knapsacks, haversacks, blankets, &c., than the Confederates ever did. We had campaigned for quite two years ere we learned the wholesome lesson from the Confederates that our men were shamefully overloaded. We saw, after the North Carolina campaign, before a Board of Federal officers, one of their men stripped and weighed—he weighed 162 pounds. He was then ordered to dress, arm and equip himself—he, his dress, arms and equipments weighed 204 pounds. It will be seen that on a march he carried 42 pounds. The Confederates never overloaded their men in any such way. Men are but men. A soldier is not a steam-engine nor a mule; there is a limit to human endurance and possibilities and it is the duty of a General in Command to know and figure on that fact.

There are times in all campaigns when Generals must make a certain point and hard marching is necessary; but

when such times come and such marches are made, straggling to a greater or less extent must occur. When Hooker made the brilliant flank movement from Stafford to Chancellorsville, in 1863, he marched his men, each encumbered with 60 pounds, 37 miles in two days and bridged and crossed two streams. Such outrageous overloading caused great discontent and much straggling. It seems to be the height of folly to wear men out with such tremendous burdens and expect from them efficient action in battle. There have been times in Continental Europe and in Egypt when men have made almost incredible marches, but they threw away their knapsacks and all else not absolutely necessary, and the surgeons lifted them up with exhilarating drugs just before exhaustion, as physicians do the six-days-go-as-you-please blackguards over tan. The Federal soldiers often threw away clothing and equipments on marches too, but in a few days they would be inspected, and be obliged to replace what articles were missing, from their pay. This caused much discontent. We have seen many Federal soldiers who would far rather go into action and take their chances than go on a forced march fully equipped.

That the straggling from each army was very heavy is true, and that that could not be helped is true too.

It being impossible to place hands on any data that will give the number of stragglers from each army, we think it fair to assume that Genl. Lee had in action on Sept. 17th about 40,000 officers and men and McClellan 60,000.

Genl. Lee's position behind the Antietam was well chosen, and the calm and steady Longstreet commanded his centre and right, and the brilliant Jackson, as thoroughly at home on the defensive as in his turning movements, was on his left. His men made the best use of their time in throwing up crude breastworks with fence-rails where it was thought they would be necessary. The morning artillery duel of the 16th had ceased, the gunners were idle, and the skirmishers at the front only were busy.

No one could throw his eye over even an outline map of the



field and note the Potomac and the Antietam wriggling through the country without knowing at once that the vicinity is mountainous.

In the Confederate front was the Antietam; on their flanks and rear was the Potomac. In the rear of the line, drawn in front of Sharpsburg, are two fords of the Potomac; Boteler's ford, about a mile east of Shepherdstown, and another about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles above, as the crow flies, near Cox's house. These, if necessary, were to be their lines of retreat. The field itself is not mountainous, but rolling, and is cut by several creeks—trifling little trickles that have not been christened. The Antietam is about 70 feet wide. We say about; of course it varies, but it averages about that, and along the hostile front it was spanned by three substantial stone bridges, that are twelve or fifteen feet wide and 150 feet long, with stone parapets four feet high; three arches under each bridge. The lower bridge is now and probably ever will be called the Burnside bridge; the next bridge above is on the Sharpsburg and Boonsboro' road. It is said that this bridge is but a mile from the Burnside bridge; it is the longest mile you ever saw. We have paced the ground frequently and found it a mile and a third. It may be but a mile as the crow flies, but you cannot march troops as crows fly. Some three-fourths of a mile above this bridge, a little east of Kennedy's house, is the third bridge. There is another bridge farther up, but this was out of fire; it was called the upper bridge. Besides the bridges there are two fords close to Burnside's bridge; one three or four hundred yards below, the other the same distance above; and there are two upper fords—one a little below Pry's mill, the other immediately west of Pry's house. The Antietam is sluggish and flows in a deep ravine, almost a valley; the ground back of the banks on the east side, from the center bridge south, springing up from 70 to 80 feet; on the west side it is not quite so high. About two miles east of the stream the Red Hills rise from 350 to 400 feet, by aneroid. These commanding heights were

immediately used by the Federals for signal stations and their possession gave them a very great advantage, as from them, as the field is generally an open one, every day-movement made by the Confederates was seen by the signal officers and telegraphed to McClellan's headquarters but two miles distant. McClellan's headquarters were at Fry's house. In nearly all the maps and reports this is put down Fry's; that is an error. A Mr. Poffenburger lives there now.

It was not the intention of the Confederates to defend the bridgeheads with any very heavy force, as the Federal artillery could have battered them too severely had their men and guns been placed there, but rather to delay the Federal advance at the bridges as long as they could with some artillery and men, and fight the main battle nearer Sharpsburg, where they could, on the defensive, take advantage of the many stone walls and fences that ran generally north and south.

Genl. Lee placed his lines to the north, south and east of Sharpsburg about so: Jackson on his left, Longstreet on his center and right; to the left of Jackson, almost touching the Potomac, was Stuart, with his cavalry dismounted, ready to act as infantry, and his batteries, about 30 guns. From Stuart Jackson strung along his divisions, facing north and east, down to the southeast of the Dunker church, where they connected with D. H. Hill's division; Hill's division connected with the left of Longstreet's divisions, which faced east and continued down to the Burnside bridge and below. Burnside's bridge was defended by Genl. Tombs with Genl. D. R. Jones's division in support.

As the Confederate left and center were formed the good road, which leads from Sharpsburg north, ran in their rear, and this was made excellent use of by Genl. Lee to reinforce his left when in danger of being overwhelmed, by marching troops from his right and center. About a mile north of Sharpsburg, west of this road, is an oak woods. A quarter of a mile north of this is another woods. South-

east of this is still another woods. These woods are much as they were in 1862, having been thinned but little since. The Dunker church is on the easterly side of the first-named woods. Two houses have been built near it since the battle that partially hide it from view as you stand in what is now the National Cemetery and look north. The Sharpsburg and Hagerstown road was and is partially flanked by stone walls on both sides, making it strong for the defense, and a ridge but a few rods west of it rises a few feet, on which artillery was placed, and its infantry support was well sheltered behind it. In the woods about the Dunker church outcropping ledges of rock afforded excellent cover for infantry. To the west of the northern end of the woods about the Dunker church is a height, sixty-five feet higher than any ground in its immediate vicinity and three or four acres in extent. No one could stand on that knoll and not see what a tremendous fire from a few batteries placed thereon could have been poured into the Confederate left and left rear. It would have been decisive.

It is hard to impress upon those who never saw field operations the great advantage in securing the tactical defensive. Look at Fredericksburg. Greater gallantry was never seen on any field than the Federals showed there in charging the heights again and again. The Confederates granted them that meed of praise generously, and yet, using but 20,000 or 25,000 men, they could afford to laugh at the Federal assaults and, with a loss of less than 5,000 men, they hurled back the Army of the Potomac with a loss to it of 13,000. At Malvern Hill, in the gallant Confederate charge on the Federal artillery, well supported by infantry, the Southern loss was terrific and the loss to their opponents was but trifling. At Gettysburg, in the Confederate charge of the 3d day, we see six or eight thousand men killed and wounded and the defenders punished but little. At Cold Harbor a loss of 15,000 was inflicted upon the army on the offensive while the loss to the army lying behind their works was less than a thousand. Good advice was

given by one of the masters in the Art of War:—"Never attack a position in front that can be turned."

The fine position Genl. Lee secured here showed his wisdom; the ability he exercised in concentrating his scattered army to take it showed his skill; the gallant tenacity he brought into play to hold it for two bloody days showed the valor of his troops. And as McClellan was so ill advised as to the numbers of his opponent, the determination to attack his enemy in his chosen position showed a conclusion that was very creditable to him; his marching Pope's beaten army from Washington, reorganizing it on that march, and bringing it to the east bank of the Antietam in good condition showed his ability as an organizer, and the enthusiasm of the troops whenever he appeared among them showed the love they bore him.

Permit another digression right here. Artillery unsupported by infantry is anything but an effective arm. A battery can be neutralized and crippled by a dozen good sharpshooters. You cannot fight skirmishers with cannon any more than you can fight mosquitoes with fowling-pieces. Sharpshooters, fighting on their bellies, can creep or roll close to guns and pick off the gunners, and they are powerless to prevent. But if artillery has infantry support, and from that infantry support a few skirmishers and sharpshooters are taken and sprinkled in its front to care for the enemy's skirmishers and sharpshooters when they come, it then becomes a tremendous arm. A battery, or several batteries in line, with infantry lying down in its rear as support, when charged by infantry, can punish that infantry frightfully with canister. That punishment is generally sufficient to stop any such charge; should it not be, the supporting infantry rises and passes through the guns and meets such charge with a counter-charge that is almost always successful.

Artillery fire at a long distance, say from six or eight hundred yards to a mile, does very little *general* damage to infantry on the defensive. It may demoralize green troops,

but men who have heard such racket before know how to take care of themselves—the day has gone by when armies are put to rout by breaking pitchers, blowing trumpets, and holding up lamps. When infantry on the defensive receives artillery fire from a distance, they lie close to the ground and nearly all the shot and shell pass beyond them or fall short. Occasionally a shell may explode and kill and wound men, but such fire does no *general* damage.

After the artillery duels of the 16th ceased the Confederate gunners had orders to indulge in them no more, but to reserve their ammunition for the charges that the Federal infantry might make, and they did reserve it to a very good purpose, as we shall see. Each army had an abundance of artillery at hand. The Federals had a much larger number of guns than the Confederates, but neither army had sufficient ground for it to bring into action all the weight of metal it possessed—Genl. Lee's lines were not over four miles long when the ball opened, and they were shorter than that at sundown of the 17th. It must be remembered, however, that the Confederates had no opportunity to replenish their ammunition train from Richmond since their battles in Virginia, but they had captured some stores at Harper's Ferry. The Federal artillery was very well supplied in Washington before it marched up into Maryland.

(With your permission we will not describe a mass of tactical details of the two days; they could not be better told than Genl. Palfrey tells them in his late and most admirable work—"The Antietam and Fredericksburg, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1882.")

General Lee's project was the defensive with offensive returns should circumstances permit. Genl. McClellan determined to fight an offensive battle, and his plan was to throw two or three, or, if necessary, four corps across the Antietam at the upper bridge and ford, attack the Confederate left; then advance his left and attack their right, and when either of these movements should be successful, advance his center. With this end in view Hooker was



ordered at 2 p. m. of the 16th to cross with his corps at the upper bridge and ford, and attack the Confederate left. Brave Old Joe was very right in feeling ticklish about this; he expressed the opinion that "Bob Lee's whole army will bounce my corps on the other side and eat us up," but McC. promised to support him with other corps and so he did. Hooker crossed at the upper bridge and ford, a little before 4 p. m., marched northwest about two miles and then south, and struck Genl. Hood's division on Miller's farm. He had three divisions, Doubleday's, Ricketts's, and Meade's, and he claims that he drove Hood's division back. Hood, on the other hand, claims that he held his ground at first and then drove Hooker. The fighting was done principally by Meade's division, and there is no doubt that the pressure of superior numbers against Hood, as he fought well advanced from the main Confederate lines, gradually forced him back. All the firing did not cease till quite 9 p. m., when Hood was relieved by Lawton, with two brigades, and he retired to the rear to feed his hungry men.

As Hooker swung himself out of his saddle he said to his staff: "We are through for to-night, gentlemen, but to-morrow we fight *the* battle of the war." During the night Genl. Mansfield, with the 12th corps, crossed where Hooker did and bivouacked about a mile in his rear, facing south; Genl. Sumner with his corps, the 2d, crossed early the next morning, the 17th, and this was to be the day of battle.

At early dawn Hooker advanced and attacked Jackson, who had there the brigades of Jones, Winder, Lawton, Trimble, and Hays, with six batteries. Jackson was also greatly assisted by Stuart's guns on his extreme left, and by Hood's and part of D. H. Hill's divisions on his right, and another small brigade, and all the rest of the Confederate artillery on their right and right-center. The fighting was begun at the west side of the woods to the north and east of the Sharpsburg road, and the Confederates, after an awful struggle, were forced back to the woods about the Dunker church.

By this time the punishment these troops had inflicted upon each other had shaken all fight out of them for the time being, and many stragglers were streaming to the rear from each side, and the long-range Federal batteries across the Antietam began to drop their shell into the Confederate ranks.

During a lull and breathing-time the Confederate officers made their men lie down to escape the artillery fire; then they assumed the offensive most gallantly and began to make Hooker give way.

At this time about 7 a. m. Genl. Mansfield, with the 12th Corps, arrived. He, an educated officer of high character, was mortally wounded while his men were deploying—his command passed into the hands of Williams. Hooker's and Williams's men forced the Confederates back again until the Southern batteries were uncovered: these, opening with canister, held the Federals in check. Here was seen the wisdom of the Confederate artilleries holding their fire till it could be used against infantry. This was one of the most terrible struggles of the war. An officer of rank, who was closely related to Jackson officially, has informed us that he never saw him depressed in any battle but this. He felt and knew that he was greatly outnumbered, but he used the two arms, infantry and artillery, so effectively that he was not driven from the woods about the Dunker church.

At this juncture the combatants were fought out again, and Genl. Sumner, with the powerful 2d Corps, arrived on the field, at 9 a. m. As he went to the front he met Hooker who was being taken to the rear, wounded. He afterwards stated, before the Committee on the Conduct of the War, that Hooker's corps was dispersed and routed. This was an error. The 1st Corps was much demoralized by their heavy casualties; they had charged the Confederates; had forced them back to their batteries in position, and had suffered terribly from canister; their right flank had been much battered by Stuart's artillery fire from Jackson's left; they had received the confederate counter-charge and had been

punished terribly, but they were not dispersed and routed—they were lying down to escape the shower of canister from the Confederate guns.

When Sumner arrived it seemed that the preponderance of force would surely sweep the Confederates from the field, but his dispositions were so faulty, the Confederates, having just received reinforcements from their center and left—the divisions of McLaws and Walker—assumed the offensive once more, hurled back his right division under Sedgwick, and all of Hooker's and Williams's men across the space intervening between the east and west woods, clear to the western edge of the east woods—the original position assumed at dawn. The Confederates made no attempt to hold the ground they had won, but retired to the woods about the Dunker church. As they retired Hooker's men, now under Meade, Williams's men, Sedgwick's men, now under Howard, as Sedgwick was twice wounded, followed them. The Federals in all this had fought facing south and southwest. Of Sumner's corps Sedgwick's division only had thus far been engaged. As a diversion he ordered his next division under French to attack, and it did attack facing west. This attack fell upon D. H. Hill's division, reinforced by Anderson's division, and they were forced back to the sunken road that branches off from the turnpike south of the Dunker church. This road and the high ground west of it was an excellent defensive position for Hill, and his artillery, and other guns in his rear, assisted him greatly in holding it as long as he did. Sumner's other division under Richardson fought to the south and left of French, and it came under a tremendous artillery fire from Longstreet's left, but these two divisions, as a large part of Hill's force had been diverted earlier in the day to assist Jackson in resisting Hooker and Williams, gradually forced Hill and Anderson back nearly to the turnpike on which stands the Dunker church. Hill says affairs looked very critical, but with a very few men he attempted a flank attack on the Federals just then, and that deceived them as to the weakness of that particular point in the Confederate lines.



All the fighting thus far, excepting distant artillery fire, had been done by the Federal right and the Confederate left, and the three corps that had made these attacks had been thrown in at different times. About this time, 12 m., Genl. Franklin, with two divisions of the 6th Corps, arrived on the field. His divisions were commanded by Genls. Slocum and W. F. Smith. One of Smith's brigades charged and gained possession of the Dunker church. Franklin, after a hurried survey of affairs, concluded that both sides were fought out, and the side that should assume the offensive just then would sweep the field. With this end in view he formed the rest of his two divisions to charge the woods in the rear of the Dunker church. After he had formed, and just as he was about to sound the charge, Sumner rode up and asked what he purposed doing. Franklin explained, but Sumner forbade it as his corps was not sufficiently reorganized to support such a charge. Franklin obeyed Sumner, but he had it so much to heart that he sent for McClellan. After he reached there and listened to the point in controversy, he advised Franklin not to make the charge but to wait and see what Burnside would accomplish on the Confederate left. In all human probability such a charge, just then and there, would have been crowned with the success that Franklin hoped for.

The Confederate extreme right rested near the Burnside bridge on the hills immediately west of it. It was defended by Genl. D. R. Jones's division; the bridge-head being entrusted to Genl. Toombs, with but two or three small regiments. The position is a very powerful one for the defense and the Confederates had many guns at hand. Burnside with the 9th Corps was ordered to attack there as early as 8 a. m. He delayed and delayed so long that McClellan sent repeated orders for him to attack with his whole corps. Although he had orders the day before to reconnoitre the approaches to the bridge with care; although the country people in the vicinity were ripe and ready to give him all the information he needed; although he had all his troops

in hand to make forced reconnoissances, he knew so little of the *terrain* when he received his orders of the 17th, he lost a half thousand men in a front charge on the bridge before he learned of the fords—one below and one above it—by which it might be turned.

He opened up the attack with artillery and such was his slowness, the heavy assaults on the Confederate left and left-center were over and the troops there were resting on their arms before he cleared the bridge. After repeated assaults made by the 2d Maryland regiment, the 6th New Hampshire, and Ferrero's brigade, the bridge was carried by 1 p. m. About the same time the ford below it was carried by Rodman's division. The Confederates retreated from the bridge-head and took position on high ground directly west of it. Another unaccounted for delay of two hours then occurred before Burnside's advance was begun. Then, as by this time the whole 9th Corps had been thrown over, it advanced and crowded the Confederates back to the outskirts of Sharpsburg, but no farther.

It is but fair to state that Burnside's troops greatly outnumbered Jones's division, but they overcame a severe artillery fire from their front, and the guns of the right-center of the Confederate lines were turned upon them as they advanced. Genls. Jones's and Toomb's troops fell back in great disorder to Sharpsburg, and many of Burnside's skirmishers reached the southeast edge of the town, but about this time, 5 p. m., Genl. A. P. Hill's light division arrived and joined hands with Genl. Jones and they assumed the offensive, and with the assistance of their batteries drove Burnside's men back over much of the ground they had gained. That ended the operations on the Confederate right.

At the center bridge the 1st brigade of Porter's corps crossed, preceded by skirmishers and Genl. Pleasanton's four batteries, twenty-four guns, and supported by all the Federal artillery on the east bank of the Antietam that could be brought to bear upon the Confederate center. This attack drove from the height immediately east of Sharps-

burg nearly all the Confederate artillery that had been in position there.

And the day was done and the night came down; the field was left to the surgeons and chaplains, and grim Death wagged his bony jaws gleefully over his feast and gorged himself with many more victims ere the dawn of the 18th, and that was Thursday.

After nightfall of the 17th the Confederates readjusted their thinned lines as best they could, and their position all along was scarcely a mile in the rear of that which they had held at early dawn, and this was all that had been gained by the Federals. It was what the Federal soldiers called a "string-fight." When they saw a town or village strung along a road, they called it a "string-town," and when they saw a battle where but a corps was thrown in at a time, they called it a "string-fight." This battle was so "stringy" and the mettle of the Southern troops was such that, after fourteen hours' hard pounding, it ended in a draw.

The two armies bivouacked and kind Nature did not look with horror upon the awful slaughter and burst into tears as she did after Gettysburg, but the cold stars twinkled merrily o'er 20,000 dead and wounded men, and the wearied troops slept on the bloody field.

General McClellan has been harshly criticised for not following up his partial success the next day, as Generals Burnside and Franklin urged. As Swinton so aptly states, there was a special reason why the Federals could hope for a decided success should they again attack on the 18th—their attention was attracted to the height to the northwest of the woods about the Dunker church, referred to above, and Franklin advised its seizure; besides, Burnside had a secure footing west of the lower bridge, from which he could, without preliminaries, attack the Confederate right. After a night of anxious deliberation, McClellan decided not to renew the attack till the 19th, and when his troops moved forward this day they found that the Confederates had re-

treated, with great skill and complete success, the night of the 18th and placed the Potomac between them and their adversaries.

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*       \*

It has been our humble pride and pleasure to go over this field many times. We were there last two or three Sundays ago. Where was then the dread chaos of War is now calm Peace and rustic simplicity; where was then the scream of shot and shell, grape, the bullet and the Minie, we heard that Sunday Bob White's mellow whistle, and saw the timid hare with his constant flag of truce; where were then death and wounds, the anesthetic and the knife, we heard the church bells ringing out "Peace on Earth and Good Will to Men"—and we rode into the Cemetery, dismounted, and sat on a knoll and looked across the pretty hills and mountains and then down upon the quaint town of Sharpsburg: "Buried here 4,006." These were all Federal soldiers, but they were not all killed on the field; this number comprises those who were killed and those who died in the field hospitals after the battle, and the Confederates lost quite as many; in all more than 8,000, and what was all this for? Since Cain slew Abel, men have fought. Our little ones can turn to their school-books, and see and know that, and when those little ones come to man's estate the larger tomes will show them that scarce a nation ever passed a quarter century without war. Look back, if your age will permit, and tell us what you thought when blood was flowing in the Crimea. Did you not think and say our country was so circumstanced that War could not come to us? And yet in less than ten years thereafter our fair land quivered under the marching feet of two million men. We fancied Neptune would drown Mars ere he could reach our shores, but oh! how grievously we erred in that.

Ere our National Life had rounded a century we had four wars, and war will come to us again. How, why, when, where? That it is not given unto us to know, but, unless

Clio is the veriest lying jade, come it will and it behooves us as a People to be ready for it; so, ye Law-makers on Capitol Hill yonder, touch not your Military or Naval Academy.

More than eight thousand here, and what was all this for? If there be a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow, these gallant men from North, from South, from East, from West died not in vain. No. This precious seed was sown here and the harvest was Unity, and what is the aftermath? Have we not better money, trade, manufactures, commerce, laws, than we had before 1861? Did not the awful experience of a four years' war, the Nation's adversity, bring out its true greatness and character, and carry it farther toward solidity, strength, confidence, thrift, than a century of drowsy Peace could have done? And more:—did not the gallant Southern men who fought us here see through that blood and toil and strife the true value of Unity, and should a foreign foe raise hand against us, would they not loyally rally under the Old Flag, and give their grit, and skill, and valor to defend it? Truly, "He works in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

The forgotten poetic dwarf, the crooked little thing that asked questions, dubbed him who first saw the light three centuries before our war burst upon us, "the greatest, wisest, meanest of mankind," but Macaulay said he was "the Prince of Philosophers"; and what said this prince of philosophers? He said:—"It is enough to point at, that no nation, which doth not directly profess arms, may look to have greatness fall into their mouths. \* \* \* No body can be healthful without exercise, neither natural body nor politic, and, certainly, to a kingdom, or an estate, a just and honorable war is the true exercise."

Reasoning from the past we know there is food for wholesome thought and a world of wisdom in that; but let come what will, whether our children and children's children die in their beds or on the field in years to come, as we looked across Antietam field that Sunday and heard the church-

bells, we felt a calm peace and comfort that cannot be taken away when we saw the spires pointing upward; and we knew that eighteen hundred and eighty-two years ago a young recruit enlisted in our poor ranks at Bethlehem, who brought with Him a Countersign to pass us into Higher Camps; and we knew further that on the Last Day when Gabriel sounds the Reveille there will be no more wars nor rumors of wars but all, all will be well.

CLARENCE F. COBB,

*Late Private, 9th Corps, U. S. Army.*

BALTIMORE, MD., *March 12, 1883.*















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